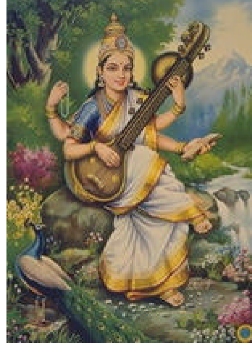


arttamulla intu matam

The *magnum opus* of Kaviyarasu Kannadasan

Read in English......

A humble tribute of Dr.N.RAMANI to a great poet....

BOOK ONE

JOURNEY AS DICTATED BY FATE

The life ordained for you is your fate.

God ordains whichever road your life pursues.

Birth is the same everywhere in the world.

Birth is certain at the tenth month of pregnancy.

Then why does life alone go in different directions? Why does death occur in many ways?

The roads to be pursued and the time and place of death are mapped in your brain even while in the womb.

He ordains everything wherever you go and however you live.

The mind may pursue diverse tracks of thoughts. But the lines of your fate decide the result of thoughts in happenings.

ulir peruvali yavula marronru

sulinum tan munturum

What could be stronger than fate?

Even at the onset of something else, it will have the sway, so says Thiruvalluvar.

The Tamil word *ul* refers to previous birth and fate.

The echoes of the past birth decide the fate of this birth.

Ilango would describe it as the inevitability of the accumulated merits and demerits of previous birth.

ulvinai uruthu vanthu uttum.

If the previous birth had been ordained to have been sinful, its atonement is written in the present.

Hence the firm belief of the Hindus is that the lines of fate alone rule you. Only they decide the happiness or sorrow of a man.

Whether what you wanted to happen happened or not, whether what happened was what you expected to happen or not - all are the proceeds of your lines of fate.

Our efforts make up one fourth and fate contributes the other three fourths.

The Hindus say, "There is a time for everything". What is the reason behind it?

It is ordained that such things will happen to you at such times. That is all.

Fate regulates the delusions of thoughts.

During the Second World War, no country was as affluent and armed as Hitler's Germany.

He caught hold of Poland in a day.

He caught hold of Checkoslavakia by threat.

He caught hold of France spending not even a shell.

He could have caught hold of the whole of Europe in six days.

He could have driven Churchill away to Canada while he was bursting rhetoric bombs.

Churchill had planned to run away to South America.

Had he conquered the whole of Europe, about eighty colonies of the European countries in Asia, Africa and Arabia would have naturally come under his rule without a single shell being burst.

All these could have happened very easily.

But fate ruled over the pride of Hitler.

He ridiculed Britain as a chick and declared that his hunger would be appeased only if he eats the elephant. He marched into the Soviet Union.

Fate laughed, "His grave is dug in the Soviet Union."

By the time he was caught in the adverse winter of the Soviet Union, America and Britain had readied themselves.

Hitler failed to be cautious. He who could have ruled over the whole world died and even his corpse could not be traced.

Fate that could divert the route of anybody’s life turned Hitler’s pride towards his own doom.

Look closely at the history of the nations of the world.

Who has succeeded in achieving all that he had thought of?

You are the one who thinks. He rounds up everything.

This is very important in Hindu philosophy.

Hinduism alone emphasises that our reins are held by God.

The beggar becoming a queen and the king becoming a beggar are but the prizes of fate in the name of luck or misfortune.

There is no use in wailing in regret. "Ayyo. I wished so much. But it has come to this!"

That it would come to that had been written even at the time of your birth.

Fate ruled Raman; Fate ruled Sitha;

Fate ruled Kaman; Fate ruled Rathi.

The fate of Kovalan of the Chola land was in the charm of Madhavi.

The fate of Kannaki was on the streets of Madurai.

The fate of Pandian Nedunchezhian was in an anklet.

Alexander’s fate ended at Babylonia.

Julius Caesar’s fate was written in the hands of his dear friend.

Napoleon’s fate was in his greed.

Gandhi’s fate was in Ghotse’s revolver.

The upraise of slaves and the downfall of the oppressors were ordained by God in time.

Why does God bestow long life even to atheists?

Because they should die only after witnessing the death of atheism.

Why does God bestow longevity on the ardently devoted?

To justify their devotion unto themselves and the others.

The God holds fate as a tool to play with.

The Hindu stories about the birth of Siva and Sakthi in diverse forms only illustrate the fact that even God subjects himself to fate and has a taste of it for Himself.

One can understand how God has worked out the philosophy of human life if the stories are taken not just for stories but for the enunciation of divine philosophy.

I have realised by experience that fate alone reigns over reason.

I gave an account of it in a story about three years ago, which reads as follows:

PIRAVAHAM

(The Spontaneous Flow)

The wise Pirakatheeswarar visited the temple.

He was a great man; a man of real wisdom; one who had renounced everything quite early in life.

A stage was decorated for him on the north of the Kalmandapam.

A huge crowd of men and women had gathered in front of him.

The sage spoke at length about what the Vedas and the Puranas say and offered to answer questions.

Everyone eagerly anticipated a question from anybody other than himself/herself.

Someone stood up at the western corner of the mandapam.

Middle aged; sharp eyes; the clarity of the one who has passed through the trials and tribulations of relationships and bindings.

Everyone in the gathering turned to look at him.

The sage asked him, "What could you have to ask?"

He said,

"Swami. There had been unresolved debates on fate and reason at various points of time.

Even now two contrary concepts exist. Some say that reason can surmount fate while the others say that fate alone defeats reason.

Whatever is true shall kindly be explained."

The sage smiled at the question.

He looked around and said, " All of you can leave now. Come in when I call you."

The mandapam was empty.

Two minutes passed by, "Come in, all of you."

Everyone rushed in and took their seats.

He asked,

"Children, All of you have come in after leaving the mandapam. How many of you are sitting at the same place as before?"

Everyone started blinking.

Only a handful of them were in their earlier seats.

The others had changed places.

He looked at the inquirer and said,

"Look! Their reason did not function even in such an insignificant matter. Had they thought a little, they would have come back in order and occupied their earlier seats. What overcast their reason?"

The inquirer said,

"It only belies their ignorance. How do you say that it is decided by their fate?"

The sage said,

"Ignorance is the handmaid of fate.

If one’s reason were clear, there is neither fate nor the ordainer of fate."

The inquirer asked,

"If ignorance is fate, doesn’t fate have its own norms?"

He said,

"They do have.

You never designed the form and place of your birth.

It is the spontaneous flow of fate that decided your specific birth in all its specifications.

You plan the way of your life. The flow of fate renders it impossible.

You decide to have a particular woman for yourself. The flow of fate prevents her from becoming yours.

The fact that the desired did not come to be asserts the existence of something higher than your own designs.

Our ancestors call it fate."

The inquirer asked,

"When is such fate decided? Where does it originate?"

The sage said,

It is decided in the void. It takes its origin from birth.

How many have lived a life of fulfillment of their own desires?

If a brave man wins, he has won because of his courage.

If a coward is defeated his defeat is because of his cowardice.

But if a brave man is defeated and a coward wins, they are decided by fate.

The heroics of individuals do not drag the flow of history.

Fate alone has always pulled it.

Fate invited Kovalan to Madurai and designed his meeting with the goldsmith.

Fate caused the fall of the Empire of France in the hands of women while the Empire had taken its origin from the same women.

Only after something had happened, reason regrets not having done something someway.

Why is reason always late?

Fate always supercedes."

The inquirer asked,

"Do you then mean to say that reason is of no avail?"

The sage said,

"It is.

The mind warns you of a deep furrow ahead.

Fate enables you to identify the danger of depth.

If fate opens the gates of the palace, reason walks in to reign.

If fate keeps the gate closed, reason only knocks at them and suffers.

Fate is the trunk and reason is its branch.

Reason might sometimes have prevailed over fate like princes' killing the kings to become kings themselves.

But fate is born the child of reason to kill the father.

The failure of prescribed dharmas and the establishment of such that are never even intended, are but because of a transcendent force.

Call it by whatever name, it alone leads us.

The experience of reason turns the desiring into the enlightened.

The fate sneaking in the form of desire turns the enlightened into the desiring.

A weak beginning leads to a strong end.

A strong beginning leads to a weak end.

If both the beginning and the end are the same, fate has not operated.

Is there such a case?"

The sage's question made the inquirer fall into thoughtfulness.

He closed his eyes and thought for a while.

There was restlessness in the mandapam.

The sage asked softly,

"Doesn't your reason help you now?"

The inquirer sat down.

The sage said,

"Where had we been before birth? Where do we go after death? As long as these questions remain unanswered, we should affirm the existence of a transcendent force.

Such force monitors the course of life.

It is not only of our own free will that I have renounced the world and you live the life of family members.

Our shadow in the morning sun is much longer than us.

It is shortened and is almost lost below the feet during noon.

It becomes larger again during the evening.

But we remain the same.

Our body is fate, our shadow is our reason."

The claps were frantic.

The inquirer alone stood outside.

"Your question and my answer are not fate. They are our reason."

"Reason can analyse fate; but it cannot reign over it."

The sage started walking.

The inquirer started following.

WHETHER STONE OR GRASS

All religions have the cherished notion that a woman should be virtuous and a faithful wife.

But only Hinduism has a number of stories emphasising it.

Any heroine of the Hindu puranas is a faithful wife with no blemish whatsoever.

Insofar as an unfortunate situation develops in a family only because of a woman, Hinduism insisted grace and chastity only to the womenfolk.

Chastity is a cherished value learnt by the daughter from the mother.

Hinduism warns that even a moment's thought about a man other than her husband amounts to becoming unchaste.

The desire of the Hindus that a woman should walk with her eyes on the ground is in fact for the sake of avoiding the look at the faces of men.

If she were to waver even for a moment at the sight of a charming face, she acquires a blemish.

The admonition to walk with eyes on the feet of others is not only to avoid possible distraction but also to keep her feet steady on her path as well as in life.

Hinduism advocates such restraints on men too.

The married woman wears *thali* on her neck. The married man wears *metti* on his toes.

Why?

The man with an upright look should notice the thali and should leave the woman understanding that she is someone else's wife.

The woman with her downcast eyes should notice the metti on the toes of the man coming in front of her and avoid him aware of the fact that he is married.

A young man and a girl shall meet each other, fall in love and get married. If this love does not fructify, they may long in distress at separation. They may whimper in grief. They may even happen to die. Their story may become an immortal story or an epic.

But a married woman should not desire a man other than her husband.

Thali is a rounded fence; she cannot afford to go beyond its obligations.

A chieftain in Tamilnadu was called *thalikku veli* = the protector of the thali.

Why is ritualistic fire kindled at the time of marriage?

The fire becomes a witness unto their future moral obligations.

In the event of going astray, the fire burns their hearts; punishes them.

That is why a chaste woman is called the flame of chastity = *karpukkanal*.

Why do they step on the grinding stone, as part of marriage rituals?

The grinding stone is part of the household. Stepping on it is an assurance that their feet will not go beyond the boundary of the house.

The popular saying is 'the chaste woman passes not the doorsteps'.

To step on the grinding stone is to say, "I will not go beyond the doorsteps."

Why look at Arunthathi, the star of dawn?

It is a declaration, "I will shine in chastity like the eternal Arunthathi."

Why take in banana with milk?

It is to declare that we will be happy as milk sweetened with banana.

Why shower flowers on each other?

Our life will have the fragrance of fame like the fragrance of flowers.

Why three knots?

It is to indicate that on the first knot she is bound unto her husband; on the second unto her parents and on the third unto God.

Yes, a woman needs the protection of all three which is vouchsafed on her marriage.

Kappu in Tamil is protection. Protection is assured in the form of *kappunan* = *kappu* (protective) + *nan* (binding).

The kappu on the groom's hand is a proclamation of the intended protection.

From childhood unto old age, Hinduism has a number of implicit proclamations for the protection of women.

The story of Anusuya is the story of how a chaste woman can make children of gods.

The story of Nalayini illustrates how a chaste woman may hold the sun from rising.

The story of Savithri illustrates that a chaste woman can win over even death.

Nakapanchami story is a different version of the same victory.

These may be ignored as fictitious. But to the one who wants his wife to be like them, they are true stories.

Kannaki pleaded the Sun God for justice in the case of her innocent husband's murder and had Madurai burnt to ashes.

Silappathikaram says that she squeezed out her left breast and threw it in fury to burn Madurai.

"Can a severed breast burn a city?", so ask the incredulous in ridicule.

The heart is on the left, close to the breast. Therefore Ilango said the left breast, not the right.

It is the burning heart that burnt Madurai.

The Hindu proverb is, "Whether stone or grass a husband is a husband."

The ridicule is "Can a stone or grass become husband?"

It is not the stone or the grass.

Whether a husband's heart is stone or whether he is as helpless or useless as a blade of grass, a husband is her husband - that is poetry.

No other religion than Hinduism has made a deity of a woman and a devotee of a husband.

The women who instinctively ensure that their breasts are properly covered when they have even an inkling that a man is looking at her are the products of Hinduism.

Chastity is thus cherished with conscious restraints. In spite of these, there are instances of women having been molested. What remedy do they have?

Let me cite a historical incident which emphasises traditional values.

During the Partition period in 1947-48, millions of Hindu victims of rape came to India.

Gandhiji argued that they had been physically molested but their hearts remain unmolested. He appealed to the Hindu youth to accept them.

I do not understand how many young men had understood the implications.

There is an unequivocal evidence in favour of Gandhiji's argument in the story of Rama whom he loved and worshipped.

That is the story of Akalikai.

The sage married Akalikai.

One midnight, Indiran crew like a cock, announcing the dawn.

The sage left the house for his ablutions and prayers, unaware of the falsity of Indiran.

Indiran approached Akalikai in the form of the sage.

The sage returned and learnt the truth. He cursed Akalikai to become a stone.

Only when the stone feels the foot of Rama would she become herself.

One day, Rama's foot stepped on the stone. Akalikai became herself again.

The sage could not forgive her. He protested saying that if she had been a woman of chastity, she ought to have distinguished between himself and another in his form while coupling together.

Rama said,

"Oh, sage! Your wisdom encloses the past, present and the future. Such a one like you could not distinguish between the real cock and the cheat. She is an innocent woman. Her heart harbours nothing other than you. She has been spoilt only physically. So it is your obligation to accept her."

The sage accepted her.

Gandhiji's argument is but an echo of Rama's argument.

As I had said earlier, errors committed in ignorance are to be forgiven.

They are to be accounted in terms of karma.

The restraint against conscious licentiousness has ensured peace unto family life.

Hey Hinduism! Thou hast made deities of women in the name of steadfast chastity and rendered homes happy. I love you like my life.

THE IDEAL LIFE

Hinduism emphasises the need for caution and discretion to the youth in choosing the wife.

"Don't marry in haste and regret at leisure." - this is the caution.

The youthful blood is swayed by passions.

Youth is the period for love as well as lust.

In the case of pure love, lust does not follow suit, post-haste.

The desire to meet her, to talk to her and to keep on talking to her, will become an obsession.

Whenever he is away from her, he would become concerned.

He will keep dreaming.

He will keep imagining.

Such pure love is the privilege only of adolescence.

Such love may be fulfilled and lead to a successful life. Unfulfilled, it may dampen the pillow with tears.

Lust inspired love is not the tune of the heart; it is the beat of the body.

Lust led youth invariably fails in his choice of the right wife.

Lust led youth likes any and every woman.

He is not able to identify the right from the wrong.

More often he chooses the wrong kind.

Lost in the blooming body, he fails to understand the fickleness, waywardness, pride, wickedness and shams of the heart within.

But the one guided by the tune of the heart focuses his attention only on the eyes.

The holiness of the soul spills out through the bashfulness and panic in the blue-black eyes.

The heart stands out pushing the shapely body behind.

Those who do not have a heart tuned to such holy love get lost in lust and come to marry the wrong person and lose their peace.

There is a sloka in Sanskrit which defines the ideal wife :

karyesu dasi

karanesu mantri

roopesu laksmi

sumava taritri

botyesu mada

sayanesu vesya

samadarma yukta

kuladarma pattini

(A *dasi* in service

A minister in advice

Lakshmi in beauty

Earth in forgiving

Mother in feeding

A paid woman in bed -

Such a one is the most virtuous wife in terms of her ordained duties.)

Dasi in Sanskrit means slave. "A wife should implicitly know the husband’s preferences" - so says a Tamil proverb. She should identify the husband’s preferences in just a few days since moving to his house and should work like a slave in fulfilling them.

She should have enough education to advise her husband at times of trouble, like a minister unto the king.

She should have the serene beauty of Goddess Lakshmi. The beauty is not that of shortening the hair, wearing tight brassiere and exposing three fourths of the back and half the abdomen, in the name of fashion.

Kanchipuram Kandanki saree, half-sleeved blouse, properly dressed long hair, turmeric-smeared face, a kumkum on the forehead - with these she walks softly looking down on the earth. Such is the beauty of Mahalakshmi.

yan nokkunkalai nilam nokkum nokkakkal

tan nokki mella nakum

She does not look at any one face to face.

"When I look at her, she looks down at the earth. She smiles unto herself looking at me when my eyes are elsewhere."

Valluvan also says "She smiles with half closed eyes held asquint"

oru kan cirakkanittal pola nokkum.

If the charm of a man could be a pleasant shock to a woman, no virtuous Mahalakshmi-like woman falls a prey to it.

They are like lightning conductors, conducting the pleasant shock away, harmless.

She is like Mahalakshmi not only in physical beauty but at heart as well.

She is like *bhuthevi* (mother earth) in patience and forgiving.

She mollifies her husband’s anger.

She should not kindle it and cause disruption in the family.

Only a virtuous woman could do this.

She should behave like a prostitute in the bedroom.

She should have the coquetry, accomplishment, wooing and teasing, typical of a paid woman.

The husband should have an unquenchable thirst for her company.

The man who had the fortune of having such a wife does not fail in life; does not have a fall in life.

Even a fool becomes bright if he were the husband of the right sort of woman. His eyes become lustrous.

Even a wise man becomes a fool and loses the lustre in his eyes if he were to marry the wrong kind of woman.

That far, that good!

But how to identify the right sort of woman?

The Hindus of Pandya region have a saying:

thayaip parthu pennedu

(Marry a girl knowing her mother for what she is.)

tharathai parthu varavidu

(Permit any one to enter your house on assessing his merit.)

nilathaip parthu payiridu

(Sow according to the quality of the soil.)

neram parthu mutivedu

(Take a decisions as per the dictates of time.)

If one were to see the mother at the riverbank, the daughter need not be looked at the doorsteps of her house.

The quality of the yarn is the quality of the fabric, the quality of the mother is the quality of the daughter.

The traditional belief is that the daughter inherits the mother's qualities and the son those of his father.

There are exceptions too.

So, if you come to know about the mother, most often you need not probe into the *bonafides* of the girl.

The haste of youth does not wait to know about the mother. He is swept away by the daughter's physical curvatures.

That is why the parents are assigned the job of choosing the bride.

They would take into account the kulam, kothiram and only then would negotiate the marriage.

Ninety per cent of such marriages arranged after due deliberations have been successful.

Love in a fit of passion -

Marriage in haste -

Ninety per cent of such marriages have failed.

So the responsibility for the choice of the bride should be vested with parents if one wants to ensure peace for life.

Love that is fascinating in fiction has in reality proved otherwise. (I have not taken into account exceptions.)

The bride is to be chosen taking into consideration the family attributes. Otherwise, losing peace for life, one may have to die a disgraceful and agonising death.

By family attributes, I do not refer to casteism. It is about the attributes of the lineage of the particular family.

You have good and bad women in any caste.

Caste and religion are to be discounted while choosing a bride because virtue is familial and personal.

Kamban makes Hanuman say this to Rama after his meeting with Sitha at Ilankai :

vir perum tatantol vira

vinku nir ilankai verpin

narperum tavattalaya

nankaiyaik kanten illai

irpirappu enpetonrum

irumpasi enpatonrum

karpenum peyaratonrum

kali natam puriyakkanden

"Oh, you the brave bearing the bow on your broad shoulders!

I could not see just a virtuous woman engaged in blessed meditation on a mount at Ilankai, surrounded by the seas;

I saw an embodiment of familial virtues;

of fortitude;

of chastity

in their unmistakable manifestation."

The offspring of the Aryas, I did not see a woman by name Sitha over there at Ilankai; she was the manifestation of virtues of her heritage; of patience and of chastity - such is his exultation.

nalattin kan narinmai tonrin avanaik

kulattin kan aiyappatum.

If a blemish is to be found in one’s bearing, it is to be traced to a blemish in his lineage - Kural.

Valluvar’s argument is that blemishes in one’s character are blemishes of the clan from which one takes one’s life.

So it is imperative that a woman’s lineage is to be taken into fastidious account in the choice of the right bride.

Once satisfied about appropriate lineage, it is enough to look for the physical beauty of the girl. The other virtues can be taken for granted.

The playful youth has to assume familial responsibility at one point of time in life. Once he is aware that the family is a chariot that had to be drawn a long way, he will naturally be wary about the choice of the right sort of wife.

The lesson is to be learnt by prospective young men from those who had been unfortunate in having chosen the wrong kind and subsequently paid the price in tears.

Avvaiyar had said :

"If she were a virtuous woman compatible unto the husband

They can live together under any condition.

If ever she were incompatible

Become a sanyasin without ado.

What if you are affluent,

If ever you had had a wife like Surpanakai or Thatakai

Poor fellow, it is better to consign yourself to flames

Than suffer disgrace."

Pattinathar wailed:

"Even as the husband slept, she put his locking arm aside;

She sneaked unto the other fellow’s bed all in full conscience.

She came back to her husband’s bed, appeased elsewhere, only to sleep.

My God Kachi Ekambara, how am I to trust her?"

It is said that the origin of rivers and rishis is not to be probed into because behind every Siddhar, rishi and sanyasi, there will be a story of betrayal by woman.

"Nothing does one lack if one has a virtuous wife in the house.

If the wife in the house is lacking in virtues ;

If I were to describe the nature of the house,

I have only to say the house is a tiger’s den."

So says an ancient quadruplet.

Illal = (*Il*=house) + (*al*=a person ruling over). If she were to lack love, humility, riches and virtues, the house is like a cave occupied by a tigress. That is the warning therein.

Those who are acquainted with the Hindu puranas know the defining attributes of a good wife.

If the youth of the day gets involved in our religious outlook, his mind will win over his eye and lead him towards the right woman.

THE GITA AND THE MIND

The Paranthaman preached Bhagavad Gita to Arjuna.

There is a debate between them on human mind.

Kannan says :

"Arjuna! It is certain that he who looks at both happiness and suffering that befalls himself as synonymous is the best yogi."

Arjuna asks :

"Madhusudhana! I am not able to achieve the poise of yogic equanimity as described by you. After all, mind is subject to vacillations.

"Krishna! Human mind is a vessel unto vacillations. It is unstable; strong; uncontrollable. It is difficult to be controlled as it is difficult to control the wind."

Bhagawan says :

"Kandeepa! You are strong shouldered. Mind is uncontrollable. It is always vacillating. No doubt. But, the son of Kunthi, it can be controlled by habit."

Ramakrishna Paramahamsar says the same :

"It is difficult to collect mustard seeds spilt on the floor. Similarly concentration is not easy since the mind flows in many directions. But it can be achieved by determination *(vairakyam).*

Dhyanayoka in the Gita preaches the ways through which the oscillations and vacillations of the mind can be brought into control.

Mind is responsible for everything - happiness and sorrow; good and evil; darkness and light; righteousness and sin.

The waves of the mind steer the body.

Mind directs the reason holding it by its reins.

Mind makes a murderer of the graceful. It is the same mind that makes a wise man (jnani) of a murderer.

The mind is easily carried away by the influences on its path. The reason does start to act at that time.

Any experience is brought about only by the mind.

The tunes of the mind blunt the sharpness of reason and the distinction between good and evil is eroded.

Since the mind occupies both the mind and the body, man is led by the mind.

What is this mind?

It wriggles in agony in the morning. It laughs at noon. It longs in the evening. It weeps in the night.

The mind never enables you to reconcile yourself to good nor bad as the same; to resign yourself to whatever may happen.

The mind never experiences passions at a uniform pace.

Even a well seasoned man drifts on the waves of the mind.

How are we to ride the unbridled mind?

The Gita identifies determination as the means.

Bhagawan Ramakrishnar also asserts the same.

What then is determination?

It is concentrating one’s entirety in the heart, to remain unmoved by any happening.

To make inflexible like wood, the otherwise wax-like mind.

To isolate the mind from one’s own desires and bindings; to refuse to yield to relationship and affection.

To hold up, to look at the exigencies of life as the games of fate.

To conclude that every happening is but a scene in the great drama of God.

To take life between birth and death as the rotation of a top not spinned by any palpable cord wound round.

To ignore those which are painful.

To accept wholeheartedly that which is pleasurable.

To forget and forgive sufferings inflicted upon us.

To console oneself in the name of divine rejection when efforts do not bear fruit.

To identify beforehand such fleeting pleasures as only fleeting by nature.

To look with equanimity whatever the soul chooses as its roost.

To become peaceful enough to realise that the incidents from morning till evening as part of the traffic regulated by God.

How easy it is to say and write about! How about practice?

It becomes possible through meditation.

To sit in solitary meditation of the name of God for half an hour early in the morning and at night either at home or in a temple.

To hold back the mind that tries to run in different directions even as it is meditating upon God.

Pattinathar who was immersed in desires became a jnani only through such holding back of the mind.

Arunakirinathar who was lost in the attractions of female anatomy came to compose the *Thiruppukazh* only by holding the mind back.

A poet endowed with a natural scholarship drives his mind through poetry while poetically focussing his mind on something.

The mind gets involved in it, appreciates it and eschews its taste.

Any interruption makes him impatient.

The eyes are open. The mind is immersed in poetry. In such a situation, even the presence of the beautiful wife in front of the open eyes is not registered.

The bowman aiming at the bird on the tree fixes his eyes on the target and becomes blind to the leaves and fruits on the tree.

The concentration which becomes possible to the poet and the hunter is possible to anyone.

That is to focus one's thoughts on one thing.

When such poise is achieved, senses and the organs of senses become inactive.

The sense of taste, the sense of smell, the sense of sight, the sense of hearing, the sense of touch - all these are put down by the mind in meditation. It stands proudly like a hunter who has shot down a tiger. That is the right poise.

A maestro does not undertake a research in history. His concern is with swaras and ragas.

To focus one's mind on one thing in one stead is to achieve a serene state of mind.

There is a story.

A mother with a month old child was abed on a mat. A snake was crawling at a little distance from her. She did not notice it.

The relatives who saw the scene became greatly perturbed.

They were afraid that the snake might attack the mother and the child.

They shouted the name of the mother.

She did not wake up.

They struck her with a stick.

She did not wake up.

They dropped a jasmine flower on the child. The mother woke up instantly and instinctively threw it away.

She did not wake up when she was struck. How did she then wake up when just a flower fell on her child?

Her mind had been focussed on the sleeping child.

The devotees, Alvars, Nayanmars are such. They had converged their entire self on God and their bodies and minds were melting in devotion.

I had many a time faltered because of the diverse assumptions of the mind.

I have struggled between desire and guilty fear.

Birth is the father's handiwork. Death is God's invitation. The life between them is a stage performance without make-up. This thought gets strengthened within me every day.

I have not yet been properly seasoned.

The mind suffers the onslaughts of the unexpected.

When something is discarded, another rushes in.

My peace lies in crushing everything down my feet.

But my feet are not strong enough.

I am trying to acquire the strength and I will.

I am cultivating a certain equanimity which will make me neither happy at birth nor sad at death, the equanimity that Parandhaman had advocated.

If ever I were to achieve it, the purpose of tears will be defeated.

I have said all those to make you realise that Hinduism enables us to achieve a poise of mind even while within the materialistic life, with its own exigencies.

Of the many means through which Hinduism keeps materialistic life prim, the Gita is one.

OTHER RELIGIONS

Hinduism does not hate other religions. In fact it considers all religions equal to itself.

Religious hatred has never been initiated by Hinduism.

Its broad arms have grown in embracing other religions.

Paramahamsar looks at the Transcendent Reality *(paramporul)* for a lake and all religions as steps descending into it.

Hinduism proclaims that love does not grow through hatred as it does through love.

Hatred dances within a closed circle.

But love expands mind like the sky and the sea.

We cannot possess the sky in shares as we do the land.

To Paramahamsar land is religion; the sky is the Transcendent Reality.

Kun Pandian and Mankayarkkarasi had been the last Hindus who had persecuted the Jains during the days of its glory, hanging them.

Hinduism has never practised religious persecution either before or after them.

"One can reach the rooftop by means of a ladder or a bamboo platform or even a rope.

Similarly there are different means to realise the Transcendent. Every religion in the world directs man through one such means.

Though the light emitted by different electric bulbs will have different intensities, electricity has a singular origin.

Similarly all the preceptors who appear in different countries at different times are like lamps emitting light emanating for ever from a single omnipotent origin." - so says the Paramahamsar.

If the God of all religions is the same, why do various religions describe God variously.

Paramahamsar answers :

"You are the master of your house; husband to your wife; father to your son; master to the servant and yet you are only one.

Just as each one looks at you in terms of his or her relationship with you, so do different religions look at God differently."

This remark of Ramakrishna illustrates the broadbased nature of Hinduism.

The agnostic arguments which rose at different points of time against the Hindu tenets had a natural death because of this broadbased nature of Hinduism.

Hinduism has always emphasised tolerance and accommodating each other.

Hinduism says, "A physical wound would be cured but not a wound at the heart. So do not hurt anyone."

Since the responsibility to punish is resigned unto God, one naturally becomes strong enough to bear the buffeting exigencies of life.

The scientific assertion that everything is subject to change over time has been asserted as a philosophic truth by the Hindus.

The Hindu precept is "Wait until the change".

The unseasoned mind leads to wayward action.

The experiences on the path of life season one’s mind.

The essence of Hinduism is "He who sows seeds of hatred will also change one day. Let us wait till then."

I have to write thus because of the complaint that I do not give the other religions their due in this series of essays.

When I keep writing about the goodness of Hinduism, it should not be construed that other religions do not have such goodness.

I am writing about the great aspects of Hinduism as a Hindu.

Such aspects may be there in other religions. I do not refute.

For example, I have written, "Even if a stone, a husband is worthwhile to a virtuous wife", while writing about the aspects of the Hindu woman’s chastity. A Christian friend has asked me, "Don’t we have chaste women in Christianity?"

Have I said so?

I have only said that there are quite many stories in the Hindu literature emphasising chastity as a feminine virtue.

I will cherish no hatred for any religion as my ancestors have also not cherished such hatred.

"The layman considers his own religion as the greatest of all and makes a hue and cry in his ignorance. Once true wisdom dawns, he becomes inclusive in his attitude towards other religions. - so says the Paramahamsar.

True wisdom has not yet dawned within myself. At least I have learnt to love all other religions from Paramahamsar.

So, when I go on describing the great aspects of Hinduism in this series, I should not be taken to say that other religions do not have such great tenets.

"My wife is beautiful", does not mean, "The other’s wife is ugly."

PRAY, YOU SINNERS...

(This is not meant for all sinners but only to the simpletons of them)

Our Lord!

The Origin of all!

We kneel in your temple where the lamps of burnt clay are lighted.

Our lowered hands rise up in prayer.

We worship you bringing our palms together.

We declare that there is no hidden weapon in our palms brought together in prayer.

Bestow upon us restive eyes and a mind that cannot be lured away.

Forgive us our sins of the past.

The heart that has originated in the nihility should perforce assume a form. But our hearts had never grown.

Even after the physical growth it remained in its nihilistic form.

Just as the blind man held a black scorpion when he had lost his stick, we have been caught in sins in forgetfulness of our spirit.

Forgive us our sins of ignorance, oh, the primordial Lord.

We drank poison taking it for amrita.

We wore thorns taking them for flowers.

Our veins were held by our desires and our path was not governed by our souls.

We went behind out desires. We understand our mistakes only after we have been punished.

When we stepped on excreta, we did not realise that it was excreta that we had stepped on.

We could not feel by the sense of touch.

Only when we smelt it did we understand.

These are foolish not knavish.

The lamp of our reason did not glow in the darkness we traversed.

Our lives have been at the mercy of desires like a sailship at the mercy of the winds.

Had we desired someone else’s wife in lust, it would have been the sin of our desire for woman.

Had we desired someone else’s wealth, it would have been the sin of our desire for wealth.

Had we occupied someone else’s land, it would have been the sin of our desire for land.

Oh Lord, You are enjoying the fun of creating our desires and getting us ensnared in their interplay.

We have realised that all that we took for the lasting were only fleeting by nature.

Like dried leaves fallen off trees looking with yearning at the green leaves, we the sinners long for the life of the holy wise when we look at them.

Hey Harihara! bestow such a life on us.

We know that a cooked cockerel cannot crow.

We have not bespoilt ourselves totally.

Our eyes were opened even as we were halfway.

Only our wings have been clipped.

We have neither been killed nor cooked.

In such a state, oh Lord in everything, allow our feathers to grow again.

We were ignorant that the eyes were meant to see the good; the ears to hear the good; the nose to smell the fragrant; the mouth to say the good; the arms to help the deserving and the legs to walk towards good men.

If any one of these organs has committed an unwary mistake, impose no punishment and forgive.

We understand the ancient Hindu saying , "Incurable diseases are ordained by God."

Save us from incurable diseases, oh the Dancing Lord.

The fish eats the insect out of hunger;

The crane eats the fish out of hunger;

Man kills the crane out of hunger;

Man’s misdeeds are committed out of hunger.

If hunger alone had been responsible, permit us to live peacefully insofar as you have caused us our ignorance.

We need reasons to find the right in worldly life just as a knife is needed to extract the eatable pulp from the jackfruit.

We are not ashamed to acknowledge our lack of reason.

It is said that when a fool realises that he is a fool, he becomes wise.

We have realised.

We have come to the temple to wash our sins away and obtain peace.

God!

Camphor is lit in your presence.

Plantains and coconuts are offered to you.

We have now understood the implications.

Camphor burns itself away.

It leaves no residue.

The plantain tree affords every part of it for man's use.

So does the coconut tree.

No part of it is a waste.

That man should be of use to the world with nothing about him wasted is the implication of these Hindu offerings.

We tried only to make use of others. We were of no use to anyone.

Our eyes have opened now.

We are ready to render whatever service is desired by you of us. Order us in our dreams.

We expect you in our dreams.

Oh Srikrishna! You showed unto everyone that worldly life can be lived casually with no suffering caused to anyone.

Oh Srirama! You showed that success in worldly life is assured even belatedly if at all we are bound by certain norms.

Oh Muruga! You symbolise righteous devotion.

Oh Siva! You assure us that you will stand by if we choose any of the three.

Oh Lord Vinayaka! You assure safe passage through any of the four paths.

Now we understand the meaning of the Hindu polytheism.

We submit our sins here; despatch to them your forgiving.